Dialogues

By

Desiderius,

Abbot of Monte Cassino

(Pope Victor III)

An English Translation

Dialogues on the Miracles of Saint Benedict

Desiderius, Abbot of Monte Cassino

Prologue

Because, by the gift of God, I have come to know of the miracles which He willed to be performed to the praise of His name in this monastery of Monte Cassino – those done in our time or related by our elders – I have resolved to write them down. I am unable to include everything in writing. Many things have escaped memory, and being occupied with governance, I myself have not been able to examine the things I write. Nevertheless, I will endeavour to recount a few things out of many for the edification of the listeners.

If I wished to recount in order all the things I myself have seen or which have been reported to me, the day would fail before the account is complete. I have undertaken to write this not so much because of confidence in my ability, but because the matter seemed to have been neglected. I feared that, as until now, so also in the future. Being left aside through the negligence of writers, such miracles might slip from memory and be consigned to oblivion.

Being requested by the brothers – and especially by you, dearest brother Theophilus the Levite – that I should diligently and faithfully relate all things heard or seen that are worthy of remembrance to your ears and theirs, I have endeavoured to obey such a devout and earnest request, albeit in rustic style. I pray to Almighty God that He who grants grace to His servants for performing virtues and wonders may not deny me speech, so that I may recount these things worthily and faithfully for the benefit of many.

Theophilus:

I, indeed, not only desire to know those miracles which, by the Lord's bounty, have been wrought in this monastery of Monte Cassino, but also those which the Lord Christ, in these recent times, has deigned to perform through His servants in other regions.

If you know of any, I beg you, tell them to me, who am thirsty to hear. For this reason I especially ask you to write. Many are more effectively stirred to the practice of good works and to the love of the heavenly homeland by examples of virtues than by words of exhortation.

Desiderius:

First, in answer to your desire, I will include in two books those things which have been done in our monastery. Then I will strive, as life allows, to set down in two other books the rest I have heard or seen from other regions. So that I may remove every doubt from the minds of readers, I will append in each case the names of the persons by whom these things were reported to me. I judge it better to remain wholly silent than to recount something false or erroneous.

Theophilus:

Since Scripture says, "The mouth that lies kills the soul," why did the blessed Paul, along with Silas, when held in custody in prison, assert he was a Roman, when it is more than clear he was not Roman, but a Jew?

Desiderius:

Far be it from the hearts of the faithful to believe the preacher of truth and teacher of the nations fell into falsehood in any respect. The blessed Paul both was and was not a Roman. He was not a Roman, because he was not born in the city of Rome. Yet he was Roman, because the whole Jewish people, like nearly the entire world, lived under the dominion of the Roman Empire. Also for this reason: because "Roman" is interpreted as

"exalted," he could most fittingly and justly call himself Roman, because he did not at all doubt he was exalted. As he himself says: "Our conversation is in heaven."

Theophilus:

I confess, what you say is very pleasing to me; but now, I beg you, begin to tell what you had promised.

Dialogues on the Miracles of Saint Benedict

Desiderius, Abbot of Monte Cassino

Book One

Desiderius:

The matter I relate is well known and confirmed by the testimony of our elders. It concerns the most reverend man Apollinaris, abbot of our monastery (which by God's favour, I unworthily serve).

Apollinaris' holiness, kindness, and generosity became known to all dwelling in this province. On a certain day he was compelled to inspect the estates of the monastery, and so he came to the river Liris. There was no boat by which he could cross the river. Full of faith, protecting himself with the sign of the Holy Cross, he approached the riverbank. Just as he was clothed in garments and shod on his feet, so he entered the river and came with dry step to the opposite bank. Even his shoes were not wet.

Of how great holiness and of how great religion and merit this man was before Almighty God. Though burdened still with the weight of the body, it was granted to him to walk on the liquid element as though on dry land. He may indeed be considered like the prince of the apostles in this deed, when he walked with dry step over the waves, the Lord commanding.

Theophilus:

Indeed, I observe, and I greatly marvel that in our times, when according to the prophecy of the prophet, "the holy one has failed; truths have diminished from the sons of men," and "there is no one who does good, not even one," Almighty God still deigns to perform such miracles.

Desiderius:

Consider this, dearest brother, which the Lord promised to His disciples: “Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the age.” You can rejoice rather than marvel.

Theophilus:

I rejoice and greatly exult. But, I beg, continue what you have begun.

Desiderius:

In the time when the people of the Hagarenes, having brought down a fleet, ravaged Italy far and wide, Almighty God delivered this monastery from their hands. I shall not pass over this in silence.

The raiders consumed everything with fire and sword, and even plundered the churches of the most blessed apostles Peter and Paul. Taking the Appian Way, they attacked the city of Fundi and burned it with fire, and all dwelling there were either killed or captured. Departing, they came into the vicinity of our monastery, crossing the river Liris. Night was falling upon the land, and they pitched camp, so that at dawn they might utterly destroy the whole monastery, or plunder whatever could be found there, and, as they thirsted for blood, they would also slaughter with the sword all the brothers they might find.

When this horrible, immense, and fearsome danger was announced in the monastery, the brothers, struck with excessive terror, fell to the ground. They earnestly prayed to the divine majesty that He might mercifully receive their souls, those whose bodies He had resolved to surrender – because of their sins – to so sudden and fearsome a death. For they no longer believed they would live in this world, and saw the sword of death so closely imminent.

While they were all night long covered in ashes on their heads and engaged in vigils and prayers, the most reverend Apollinaris, whose memory I have mentioned, appeared in a

vision to Bassacius the abbot, a religious man, saying: “Do not be afraid nor bear a sorrowful heart. You will not at this time be captured by the Hagarenes, nor will they be able to inflict any harm upon you. The divine right hand protects you. The Hagarenes will very soon return to their own lands. You will remain safe and unharmed, because the most holy father Benedict has obtained your deliverance from Almighty God. He himself also comes to aid you, and we all with him together.”

The venerable Bassacius the abbot awakened from sleep, and summoned the brothers together. He told of what he had seen and what had been revealed, and urged them to pray to Almighty God earnestly. Certain of divine mercy, they became joyful, praising and blessing the Lord, and spent what remained of the night in prayers and supplications.

The serenity of the air was so great that not even a light cloud could be seen. Then suddenly the sky became dense with clouds, and thunderclaps rang out. Lightning and frequent flashes glared, and so great a downpour fell upon the land that the river Liris overflowed far and wide and seemed like a sea.

At dawn, the barbarians, rising from their camp, approached the riverbank. They diligently searched for a boat, or a ford by which they might cross the river. But when all hope of crossing was gone, they were enraged by fierce barbarity. They bit their hands and fingers because, frustrated, they remained without plunder. They burned with fire the cells of our monastery located beyond the Liris, and turning their army around, departed quickly.

When they reached the place where the Liris flows into the sea with a broad mouth, they left behind all their horses, lame in their legs and with severed tendons, because they were unable to carry them. They themselves, boarding ships and giving their sails to the wind, cleaved the seas on a straight course for Sicily.

When they had drawn near to Sicily, hoping soon to reach dry land, they saw a small boat moving between their ships, swiftly gliding over the waves. In that boat sat a cleric with

venerable white hair, and another monk. When the cleric and the monk earnestly questioned from whence the raiders were returning so joyful, so eager, and so laden, the Hagarenes declared they had come from Italy and there had delivered everything to fire and sword. They even boasted they had plundered the houses of Peter, Paul, and Benedict.

"And you," the Hagarenes said, "who are you, who so earnestly, so diligently, and so curiously seek to question us?"

"We," said the men in the small boat, "are called Peter and Benedict. Those whose houses you boast of invading. Of what power and what strength we are, you will experience."

With these words, they vanished from sight.

Winds raged from all sides and waves swelled, and so great a storm arose that all the ships were shattered, colliding with each other or dashing upon the rocks. From that multitude of pagans scarcely a few survived, who might report these things to those who had sent them.

Truly Almighty God permitted His churches to be ravaged for a time, but He did not allow the pagans to rejoice long over such a crime. In this event, that which the blessed father Benedict once promised to his disciples was fulfilled: "Being more present with you, dearest sons, once the burden of the flesh is laid aside, I will be a constant co-worker on your behalf through the grace of God." And also that which the Lord said to blessed Peter: "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." He did not say "they shall not attack in strength," but "they shall not prevail."

For the gates of hell are pagans, heretics, and Jews, who *seem* to prevail against the Church of God, when through them the Lord permits His faithful ones to be scourged. But they shall not prevail, because Almighty and merciful God does not allow them triumph over His Church forever.

Wherefore the apostle also encourages, saying: “We suffer tribulation, but we are not crushed; we are perplexed, but not forsaken; we suffer persecution, but are not abandoned; we are cast down, but not destroyed; we are afflicted, but we do not perish.”

Theophilus:

What you say greatly pleases me.

Desiderius:

John, of holy memory, a priest who for some time fulfilled the office of dean, was afterwards appointed provost of our monastery, which is built within the city of Lucca. Of his obedience and humility, many monks who knew him and are still alive testify. But concerning the miracles which divine majesty worked through him – many have slipped from memory – I will recount a few.

This man of God was especially devoted to fasting, vigils, prayers, and above all the giving of alms. He received from the Lord such a grace of tears that those tears, poured forth from such a simple and humble heart, obtained much through Him.

When the fame of John’s holiness spread through the whole city, a certain woman, grievously afflicted with demons, was brought to the monastery. Those who brought her earnestly begged John to pray to the Lord for her, so he summoned the brothers and entered the oratory, and with many tears poured out prayers to the Lord. Immediately, he drove the demon from the woman.

Nor shall I omit what follows, which I learned from truthful men about the same venerable man – a thing so well-known hardly anyone within the walls of Lucca is unaware of it.

The wife of a certain distinguished gentleman, afflicted by illness, lay in bed; and with the sickness worsening to the point of extremity, she was for three days without sense or voice, lying as if dead. When all present had utterly despaired of her life, someone was sent

to the man of God, that he might deign to offer sacrifices and prayers on her behalf. John, benevolent in spirit and ready to grant the requests of those who begged, immediately clothed himself in priestly vestments, and approached the altar to offer sacrifice to almighty God.

Then, when her name was mentioned during the holy solemnity of the Mass, the woman – in her own home, far from the monastery – rose from the bed on which she had lain as if lifeless, and answered as though someone had called her. When those present asked her what she was saying or to whom she had responded, she said: "Is not Lord John the provost here? He called me, and I answered him."

Astonished by so unusual, so celebrated, and so amazing a miracle, both because she was whole and sound who had lately lain as if dead, and because she said she had heard the voice of one so far away – they hastened to send messengers to the monastery, to find out and report what the servant of God had been doing. They firmly believed it was not without cause that the woman had so suddenly risen from her bed and responded.

When those sent to the monastery entered the oratory, they found the man of God standing at the altar and offering sacrifice to the Lord, the giver of health, on her behalf. Carefully noting the time, they found that at the very moment she had been named during the holy solemnity of the Mass, she had risen from her bed and given her response.

Pope Alexander II, of happy memory, was a most eloquent and most learned man, who first governed the Church of Lucca, and afterward indeed the Roman Church. From his mouth, I chanced to hear the things I now relate concerning him.

That aforementioned pontiff had been seized by a fever, and had fallen seriously ill. He wearied more severely as the sickness increased each day. Then he suddenly recalled what he had heard by report concerning himself – that whoever, being afflicted with fever, drank the water flowing from the Pope's handwash after the solemnities of the Mass, would be freed from fever and returned to health.

Secretly, Alexander sent men to bring him a small amount of that water.

When the requested water arrived, he immediately drank it and was so suddenly restored to his former health that no traces of illness remained in him.

Another venerable man of holy life, named Gumizo, was a monk in both mind and manner. He came to our monastery from farther Spain, and in this nearby forest, he led a solitary life for no small time, ending his life in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. John, the abbot of the monastery of Saint Vincent, located near the source of the Vulturnus river, was very familiar with Gumizo, and recounted to me many wonderful things when he still held the office of prior in our monastery.

Gumizo's disciple, Januarius by name, was a monk of great obedience and great abstinence. At one time, when he had been sent by his master to Aquinum to repair the tools they used for work, he went to the blacksmith's house. For a given payment, he asked him to repair the tools. The blacksmith mocked him, saying: "Is this solitary man, living on bread and water, so ruddy and so plump? It seems to me this flush comes more from wine than from water he drinks."

But Januarius replied: "Today," he said, "I will show you whether I am flushed by nature or from frequent drinking of wine."

The iron was put into the fire and heated fiercely, and the blacksmith took it with tongs and placed it on the anvil. Sparks flew here and there, almost lighting up the whole house. By chance the iron, falling off the anvil, dropped to the ground. When the venerable man Januarius saw the iron fall, he bent down and took the hot iron in his bare hand. Then he placed it back on the anvil, and urged the blacksmith to strike it as soon as possible.

Those present, seeing a great miracle, were terrified. They fell to his feet and humbly begged forgiveness for the mockery. Thus the mockery the foolish men presumptuously directed at God's servant turned to veneration.

When Januarius returned to his master and his own cell, Gumizo greatly rebuked him for yielding to the mockery and doing such things in the eyes of men. When Januarius asked how Gumizo knew, or who had told him, he replied: "He who enabled you to do it, also enabled me to know."

Theophilus:

Since the Lord says: *"Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven,"* why do holy men hide their good deeds and strive with all effort that they may not be seen by anyone?

Desiderius:

Although holy men sometimes display their works in public, their intention nevertheless remains hidden. For what they do inwardly, they do not seek outward praise. They desire to provide an example to others through their good deeds, and yet, as they long to please God, they always wish to remain hidden. They conceal their good deeds when they see no gain of souls nor benefit of fraternal salvation from their being revealed. But when they perceive some gain to the glory of God may result, they allow their good works to be made known and made public. They seek not their own praise but that of their Creator.

Theophilus:

A clear explanation. I do not think anything further needs to be sought.

Desiderius:

Those things the devout monk John, who dwells as a solitary in the nearby forest under the discipline of the anchoritic life, recounted concerning that excellent man, Gumizo, I deemed worthy to add to this little book of ours. He used to say that, when he was still living in his monastery in the city of Benevento, on a certain day a certain servant of God came to him and to other brothers who were present, saying: *"Know that today a great man among the monks at Monte Cassino has departed from this world to the Lord."*

When they heard this, they were amazed that he could have seen the soul of that man departing from the body at a distance of nearly eighty miles. Not giving credence, they diligently sought to investigate. It was found that on that day the venerable man had indeed given up his soul, the very day on which the aforesaid servant of God, who was in Benevento, had perceived it.

Neither will I keep silent about what I learned from the brothers concerning the monk Mancus, whom I myself saw residing in the monastery, and who died in our own time. When he came from the region of Apulia for the sake of conversion, he was received by Abbot Richerius, our predecessor, and was joined to the community of the brothers. While he lived in the monastery in body, he dwelt in the world in mind, and always meditated on earthly and secular matters. All instruction in the discipline of the Rule seemed to him burdensome and unbearable.

He began to ask the abbot for permission and invented many excuses by which he might revisit his homeland and his parents. He was frequently admonished by the abbot to strive earnestly, to pursue the path of truth from day to day, laying aside all laziness of sloth, lest perhaps, according to the Lord's saying, "he who puts his hand to the plough and looks back" should not be fit for the kingdom of heaven. Lest imitating the wife of Lot, he be turned into a pillar of salt and become a dreadful spectacle for all.

But he, whose mind had been seized by the evil one, was by no means at rest. He daily wearied the abbot and the brothers with prayers, begging in every way that he might be permitted to return to his homeland.

And when he saw that the hope of returning had been frustrated, he secretly left the monastery, seizing the darkness of night like a runaway slave. Like a dog returning to its vomit, driven by the devil, he returned to his homeland and, staying in the house of his parents, began to live there secularly, just as he had long conceived in his mind.

Via messenger, he was often admonished by his abbot to return to the cloister of the monastery. Making little of the saving admonitions, he neglected to obey, and was excommunicated by that same abbot.

Then, after not many days, when he was taken with a slight illness and lay in bed, he beheld a huge lion entering through the door and coming at him with open mouth. Terrified at the entrance of the fierce beast, he cried out in a loud voice, saying: “Run, run, for this lion is trying to devour me!” The lion, roaring, rushed upon him and, biting his thigh, tore from it a great piece of flesh, and so, leaving him bloodied and half-dead, vanished.

Many were astonished at the sound of his cry, and though they saw no lion, they found the monk bloodied and half-dead on the ground. When they lifted him from the earth, he recovered his breath a little and told everything that had happened, and earnestly begged his relatives and neighbours that they quickly return him to the monastery.

His relatives obeyed his wish. They carried him to the cell of our monastery which is located in the town of Ascoli. There, having regained his health shortly afterwards, he returned to the monastery, and having received penance, he afterwards lived many years in the habit of holy conversation.

Theophilus:

As I see it, this monk was delivered visibly to the lion – that is, the devil – for a time, so that afterwards he might merit to be freed invisibly from his power forever.

Desiderius:

Do you also wish me to tell you how Almighty God rescued this monastery from the hands of tyrants? And protected it from the attack of enemies by the merits of the blessed father Benedict and by the right hand of His divinity?

Theophilus:

Tell what you will. With a joyful spirit, a devout mind, and attentive ears I will listen to all these things.

Desiderius:

Pandulf, Prince of Capua, was a man most powerful and wealthy. By plundering, by shedding human blood, by cruelly taking cities, towns, and lands belonging to others who dwelt nearby, he subjected them to his own dominion. For a long time, without any mercy, he insatiably committed outrages, murders, sackings, and the seizure of the goods of churches. He robbed many riches from the churches of Christ. Driven by greed, he also wickedly took all the castles, villages, and lands of this monastery, so not even a single peasant who might cultivate the fields, nor the fields themselves, was left to the monks. He carried away all the treasure of this monastery and stored it in the fortress he had built not far from the city of Capua, on the mountain called after Saint Agatha the Martyr, and there he deposited it, together with many spoils of orphans, widows, churches, and the poor.

Almighty God wished to put an end to such great crimes. The tears and cries of orphans, widows, and the poor, as well as the prayers and petitions of the servants of God were accepted before His divinity. As it is written: “The heart of the king is in the hand of God”, and so He inspired Emperor Conrad to revisit Italy and come to Rome, to avenge His churches and rescue them from the hands of tyrants.

Having entered Italy with a great army and come to Rome, it pleased Conrad to send excellent men to Prince Pandulf at Capua, with orders that he immediately restore all the goods of Saint Benedict unjustly taken. And that Pandulf release all the noblemen or men of any rank he held as captives in prison, bound with heavy chains. And that he quickly return all their possessions. For the Emperor had not set his heart on coming to these parts unless he could accomplish these things. But Almighty God, who hardened Pharaoh’s heart on account of the many evils he unjustly inflicted, so that he would not believe the signs and wonders

shown by Moses, His servant, likewise hardened the heart of Pandulf so he would not obey the imperial command.

When those men sent by the Emperor came to Capua, they spent many words with Pandulf in vain, and returned to the Emperor without success. When the Emperor saw he had been despised by the prince, he was stirred with anger. Departing from Rome with his army, he came to Monte Cassino, and went up to the shrine of the blessed father Benedict. After praying, he entered the chapter of the brothers, and when the brothers had gathered together, he asked them to pray to the Lord for him. He testified that he had come to these parts for no other reason than to rescue the monastery of Saint Benedict from the hand of a most cruel tyrant. Then, having received a blessing, Conrad departed from there and came to Capua.

The retainers of the prince, holding the goods of the monastery for their own use, learned of the Emperor's arrival, and fled in every direction and were scattered. Thus it happened that the monastery recovered in one day all the castles, villages, and lands taken from it, and the things the ministers of evil had collected came into the monks' possession. In this way the saying of the blessed father Benedict was fulfilled, which he had once foretold to his disciples when they were saddened by the lack of bread: that today they would have little, but tomorrow they would have in abundance.

The Emperor entered Capua, took from Pandulf the honour of the principate, and established another prince in his place. Pandulf, fleeing that city, withdrew to the fortress he had fortified on the mountain of Saint Agatha the Martyr. Thus, by divine dispensation, all the things he had long acquired by robbery, perjury, and the shedding of much innocent blood were lost within the span of one week. None of those many possessions and municipalities remained to him except the aforementioned fortress. He, who had forced the children of others into begging, now has descendants who, to this day, go about begging here and there.

Who can doubt that all these things happened by the merits of the blessed Benedict, whose goods Pandulf, driven by wicked greed, had unlawfully seized?

Theophilus:

About this matter, there is no doubt. The aforesaid Emperor, in the presence of the brothers, testified that he had come to Rome for no other reason than for the defence of the monastery of Saint Benedict.

Desiderius:

At another time, a certain man of Capua named Pandulf, having gathered knights from friends and neighbours and assembled no small number of soldiers, tried, at the devil's instigation, to attack and seize a castle of this monastery, which is called Conca. He departed Capua with his followers at dusk, in order to march through the whole night and, before daybreak – while all still rested – attack and seize the castle. They left the city and reached that place from which they intended to proceed no longer by day but by night, so that they would not be seen by anyone. While they lingered, night arrived. Like sons of darkness preferring darkness to light and not at all heeding what the Lord says in the Gospel: "He who walks in the night stumbles," they began to move through the field of a certain estate, hastening to attack the aforementioned castle.

Spurring their horses with bloodied spurs, and thinking they were going in the right direction, they wandered all night around the aforementioned field. But by the wondrous arrangement of Almighty God, when morning came, they found themselves in the same place where night had first overtaken them. Frustrated in their desires, confused, and wondrously wearied, they returned empty-handed to their home.

At another time, while the fishermen of this monastery cast nets into the sea to catch fish for the nourishment of the brothers, a certain Norman, puffed up in mind and swollen with pride, arrived in a furious spirit. Greedy for plunder, anxiously and insatiably coveting

others' goods, he seized one of the fishermen, stripped off the garment he was wearing, and at once clothed himself in it. Then, entering the small boat, he began to force the fisherman to draw up the nets from the deep, so that he might carry off the fish found in them. When the fisherman refused, saying he caught fish for the monks' nourishment, not for the Norman's, he was severely beaten by that same Norman and thrown into the sea. But when the Norman, eager for the prey of fish, began to draw the nets from the deep and collect the fish himself, he suddenly fell into the sea. Overwhelmed by the water, he gave up his spirit.

Marvellous to say, the wave cast him out dead upon the shore *before* the fisherman, thrown into the waters, was able to reach land alive by swimming.

Also at another time, thieves entered the cellar of our monastery by night, and stealing meat, cheese, and bacon, filled their sacks. But after going outside, they were unable to lift the sacks. Then, leaving the burden behind and attempting to flee, they wandered through the monastery's enclosures all night long, in no way able to leave. When morning came and they found themselves inside the monastery's enclosures, terrified with fear and conscious of their guilt, they knew not what to do. At last, having come to an agreement among themselves, they went out through the monastery gate, mixing with the others who were leaving the monastery for various tasks, as though they had committed no crime. Slowly making their way, so that no suspicion would arise, they stopped not far from the monastery.

Meanwhile, the cellarer, entering the cellar to provide the usual provisions for the brothers, found the sacks full in front of the entrance. Astonished and unaware of what had happened, he inspected the cellar. When he saw missing things, he was disturbed by the loss and, going outside, found everything lost in those same sacks. Greatly amazed and now understanding what had happened, he immediately summoned two or three boys and sent them down the slope of the mountain road to see whether they might find the robbers. The

boys, fulfilling their orders, had gone only a little way from the monastery when they found the thieves standing by the mountain road itself.

They had almost passed them by, having no suspicion. But the thieves, terrified by divine power and as if made mad, shouted after the boys and said: “We know, sirs, you have come to capture us. Have mercy on us; for we took nothing, but left everything at the entrance of the cellar.” Hearing these words, the boys seized them, and binding their hands behind their backs, led them back to the monastery and presented them to the brothers, just as they were, tied in bonds.

There were some who, being less cautious concerning the Lord’s command, judged that they should be beaten and so released. But the rest, pious, and more concerned with divine commandments, strove to fulfil the commands of the Lord. They released the thieves from their bonds, gave them food and drink, and permitted them to go free.

O how wondrous was the kindness of the Lord Jesus Christ, how wondrous the mercy, how wondrous the patience He taught! For although it is written in the Law: “You shall love your friend and hate your enemy,” and: “hand for hand, tooth for tooth, eye for eye,” He commanded to love enemies, to do good to those who hate, to greet those who do not greet back, to give the cloak to one who takes away the tunic, and to return good for evil to those who pursue.

Theophilus:

I confess, what you tell is most pleasing to me.

Desiderius:

The thing I recount is marvellous and greatly astounding, but it is so well known that no one ought to doubt it.

At a certain time, Sergius, the *magister militum* (commander of soldiers), in charge of the city of Naples, went hunting on the very holy Sabbath of Easter itself. Entering the forest

with his attendants to catch wild boars, and having set the nets, the men spread throughout the forest, together with the dogs. A boar, fleeing from the snare of the net, was overtaken by the hunters, stabbed, and captured.

Since the hour was now late and the sun, tending toward its setting, was already casting dark shadows, the *magister militum*, lest he be overtaken by the darkness of night, took the game he had captured and hastened homewards as quickly as possible with all his retinue. He ordered one boy, named Pythagoras, to gather the nets and quickly follow.

When the boy had gathered the nets and was following on the direct path, two monks of very reverent appearance presented themselves to him on the way. Frightened, he asked who they were. They said: "Do not be afraid. Only follow us!" And so, when they had walked a short way together through the same forest, they came to a certain lake, very muddy and horrible in appearance. There they showed to him Pandulf, prince of Capua (whose memory I mentioned earlier), who had died not long before, bound with iron chains and submerged in the filth of that lake up to his throat, in a most pitiable way.

Meanwhile, two extremely black spirits, having made twisted ropes from wild vines, bound Pandulf around the throat and submerged him into the very depths of the lake and then pulled him back up again, repeatedly. As they did this, Pythagoras, with a trembling voice, addressed the prince, asking why he was suffering such things. Pandulf, weeping and wailing, gave the following reply:

"O boy, for my innumerable crimes, many and endless punishments have been prepared for me, but I suffer this punishment for no other reason than for the golden chalice which, driven by sacrilegious greed, I took from the monastery of Saint Benedict. Even as I was dying, I neglected to return it. I earnestly beg and entreat you by Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior of all – whose commandments I, wretch that I am, despised, and so have been cast into this abyss of death – that you either go yourself to my wife at Capua or else send a

messenger. Inform her of the torments I suffer and ask that she return the chalice to the monastery of Saint Benedict."

But the boy replied: "What use to tell her? She will not believe that I saw you or that you suffer such things."

To which he replied: "Announce this sign to her on my behalf: that Pandulf, son of Guala, holds that chalice as a pledge, and that she should recover it from him by repaying the coins we owe. She must restore the chalice to the monastery of Saint Benedict without any further delay."

When he had said these things, the vision was taken away. The boy, as soon as he returned home, was seized by illness and died within a few days. But the things he had seen and the words that had been spoken to him, he revealed to all.

Pandulf himself, who had the chalice in his possession as a pledge, for some unknown reason had gone to Naples at that very time, and heard these things from the very mouth of Pythagoras, or so he later told me. Through him, that same Pythagoras informed the wife at Capua of everything he had seen about her husband and what he had been instructed to tell her.

But she, thinking of herself rather than of her husband, refused to pay the price that her husband had borrowed. She was unwilling either to reclaim the chalice or to return it to the monastery.

Theophilus:

It is to be wondered at and weighed with great caution why Almighty God wished to show such things to this boy, since the one who was shown to him was not delivered from punishment. Also, why Pandulf appeared to be tormented for the golden chalice alone while so many and such great crimes remained hidden. Or why the boy to whom these things were shown was struck with weakness from excessive fear and died.

Desiderius:

That this man was shown suffering punishments and yet, with his wife making little account of returning the chalice, was not freed from those punishments, was the just yet hidden judgement of Almighty God. Through His pious and kindly providence this was brought to the knowledge of men, so that whoever hears these things may be struck with fear, and restrain both mind and hand from robbing churches – lest before death he not be allowed to repent, and after death his relatives or kin be unwilling to perform the things by which he might be freed from torments. Pandulf now suffers eternal punishments for deeds, which, having cast aside the fear of God, he was in no way afraid to commit while living. He does not deserve mercy in that life when he neglected to merit mercy through good and holy works in this one.

That he appeared to be judged for the golden chalice alone, while his other crimes remained unspoken, is clearly meant to be understood as follows. How fiercely, how atrociously, and how miserably he must be tormented for those other vast and enormous crimes, when for the theft of a single small chalice he was already tortured in a manner so dreadful and cruel. He said to the boy Pythagoras that many immense torments had been prepared for his other offences.

That he who saw him in punishment was immediately struck with weakness and died not long after, we do not much marvel. Consider what happened to Daniel, a true interpreter of dreams. After the vision of spiritual mysteries, he immediately fell ill and, as he himself testifies, languished for many days. If so great a man could not bear spiritual visions but, immediately seized with weakness, was sick for many days, what wonder is it if this boy – devoted to worldly cares, oppressed by carnal desires – could not endure the vision of the spiritual, but, detained by illness, came to his end?

In all these things, divine judgements are more to be feared than investigated. They are great and unsearchable, as the Psalmist bears witness: “Thy judgements are a great deep.” Also the Apostle Paul, who said: “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgements and how inscrutable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counsellor? Or who has given a gift to Him, to receive a gift in return? For from Him and through Him and in Him are all things: to Him be glory and dominion for ages of ages. Amen.”

Dialogues on the Miracles of Saint Benedict

Desiderius, Abbot of Monte Cassino

Book Two

Having now set forth the first little book, as we promised, I will now, with God's help, begin to write the second. Here I shall endeavour to include the rest of the miracles done in this monastery or by the monks of this holy coenobium – wherever, by the mercy of God, they occurred in these times – that come to our memory.

When I was still a layman, living within the years of youth in the city of Benevento, I heard from many about John, then archdeacon of the same Beneventan church, and later abbot of this holy monastery.

Since that same John came from a noble family and, what is greater, lived religiously, striving in every way to please Almighty God, he was loved by the clergy and the people. To such a degree that, after the death of the archbishop of that city, all unanimously desired him for the highest priesthood.

Now there was another man in the same church, named Alax, a deacon, who aspired with all his effort to attain the bishopric. He cared not by what means he might attain it; but while John the archdeacon lived, he despaired of reaching such a height of honour.

As he daily turned these things over in his mind, vain thoughts allowed him no rest. On a certain day, the two sat down together in secret, with no one else present. A conversation arose between them about the frailty of this miserable life, about the joy of the heavenly and eternal life, about the punishment of sinners, and the everlasting glory of the righteous.

Thus, they resolved to abandon the glory of this world and to take up the habit of holy life; and, to bind their agreement more firmly, they confirmed it with an oath. They fixed a

day on which they would travel to the fortress of Monte Cassino, to the threshold of blessed Benedict, and there serve the Lord Jesus Christ under the Rule of his discipline.

When the appointed day arrived, on which they were to set out, Alax – who had one thing in his heart, another on his lips – said to John the archdeacon: "Dearest brother, something still remains among my affairs which I wish to set in order according to God. I beg you, go on ahead, and as soon as you have received the habit of holy life, send a message to me. I, meanwhile, having completed these matters, will quickly follow."

The archdeacon came to the monastery of the blessed father Benedict, and as soon as he received the holy habit, he sent, as they had agreed, a message to his companion, to inform him that he had submitted his neck to the Rule of holy instruction, and that Alax should come quickly, as he had promised.

But as soon as Alax heard this, he became cheerful, seeing that the one who had surpassed him in the church had withdrawn. He altogether denied that he could go to the monastery or undertake such a narrow path. Then Alax strove with all his strength to obtain the honour of the bishopric.

But almighty and just God disposed otherwise. For when Emperor Otto had left Germany and entered Italy, he arranged Roman affairs as seemed best to him, and then he went to Benevento. There Alax became so familiar with him that the Emperor ordered him to be elected bishop, though the church refused.

Afterwards, the Emperor, returning to Rome, asked the Roman pontiff to consecrate Alax, and after he was consecrated, he sent him back to Benevento. Then the Emperor, seized by fever, died by divine ordinance after a few days.

Alax, returning to Benevento, did not even dare approach the city walls; with Alax having been driven away with disgrace, the citizens elected another as bishop for themselves.

Indeed, Almighty God did this for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of the good. He, who was driven by greed for honour and who deceitfully strove to drive his brother from the church, was himself driven from his homeland and ended his life in exile in a foreign land.

Beyond these things, what follows I heard from Leo, a man of venerable life, who died a few years ago, and from other elder monks.

When that same John had spent several years in the monastery under the Rule of holy instruction, he received permission from his abbot, and travelled to Jerusalem. He lived six continuous years in the service of God on Mount Sinai. Afterwards, he remained for some time in Greece, on the mountain called **Agyon oros** (*Holy Mountain*).

The things he saw in that place do not at all seem to me to be withheld.

A certain hermit, living on that same mountain, was visited or known by few. On a certain day, when the brother who served him and brought him food on fixed days had led the aforementioned John, a venerable man, to that servant of God – just as he himself was later accustomed to tell his disciples with tears – John was kindly received by the hermit, as was fitting.

A discussion arose between them about the joys of heavenly life and lasted some time. The servant of God said to those who had come: “Come, brothers, for now it is the hour that we take nourishment for the body, lest you faint on the journey when returning; for you should not depart from us fasting, for whose sake you undertook so great a journey.”

Saying this, the hermit prepared a table, and set out the meal. Having made a prayer, they sat at the table. Then, marvellous to say, a huge bear came out of the nearby forest. Appearing before the faces of those eating, it offered a honeycomb of sweet-flowing honey.

They, very terrified, tried to flee, but the venerable hermit restrained them and warned them not to be afraid, saying it had been many years now that Almighty God had, by that beast, sent a gift of honey-sweet nectar by His mercy.

After the meal was finished, they rose from the table, more satisfied in spirit than in body, and receiving a blessing, they returned to the monastery.

Not many days later, the most blessed father Benedict appeared to that same John in a vision. Giving him the pastoral staff he held in his hand, he advised him to return quickly to his monastery at Monte Cassino.

In the morning, John told the abbot of that monastery – a religious man indeed – of the vision he had seen. As the abbot was prudent and discerning, he recognised the will of God in this vision, and said:

"Brother John, hasten to return to your monastery, lest you seem disobedient to so great a father who appeared to you in a vision. For it has been decreed, as it seems to me, that Almighty God wishes to appoint you over His flock and to choose you in His mercy to faithfully feed His sheep."

Obeying the vision and the admonition, John left the lands beyond the sea, and with Christ as his guide, he returned. By the very religious man then presiding over the brothers, John was made prior.

That same abbot was already weak in body and unable to bear the burden of so great a responsibility. Not long after, by the counsel and election of all the brothers, John was ordained abbot by that same venerable father.

The former abbot, having relinquished the abbacy, withdrew into a nearby forest and there, living as a solitary until the end of his life, ended his life in the service of Almighty God.

Meanwhile, those things I have heard about the blessed Felix, a monk of this monastery, must not be left unmentioned.

At a certain time, for a reason I do not know, it happened that I went to the city of Teate (modern Chieti). I was kindly and amicably received by the bishop and clergy and they led me to the church for the purpose of prayer. After prayer I turned to the right of the church and there I saw a small chapel and altar.

When I asked the bishop and clergy in whose honour that altar had been built, I was told the altar had been dedicated in honour of the blessed Felix, confessor of Christ.

And when I inquired who this Felix was, they told me he had been a monk of the community of Monte Cassino and had been sent by his abbot to those parts, to preside over the shepherds and the flock. There he ended his life, and since Almighty God performed many miracles at his body, he was taken up from the place where he had first lain by their ancestors and placed in that church, "under this altar, as you see."

They recounted that a certain memorable thing was recently performed in that place by him, with Almighty God granting it. A certain blind man had come – striking his feet against every obstacle – to beseech the merciful Lord. He came before the altar and, lying prostrate on the ground with his whole body, prayed with groaning and sighs that the Lord might have mercy on him through the merits of the blessed Felix.

Immediately, with the darkness of his blindness dispelled, the man rose so healthy and unharmed that, to the amazement of all, he began to see with his own eyes the light he had always longed to hear others speak of.

Theophilus:

I would like to know whether this venerable man, who shone so brightly after death, gave any sign of the merit of his life while he was still alive?

Desiderius:

I did not find that this venerable man, while living in this world, gave any sign of his virtues. However, Almighty God is often accustomed to act in such a way that those who strive to serve Him with a devout mind no longer have their merits hidden after death, even though they showed no sign of sanctity while in the flesh. For when their bodies, now deceased, are seen to shine with miracles, the minds of humans are all the more stirred to zeal in His service.

Theophilus:

I admit that what you say pleases me. Continue what you have begun, so that, while I listen to the things I greatly desire, my weary soul may be refreshed with love of the heavenly homeland.

Desiderius:

A certain monk of this monastery, called Gregory, was of the highest religious devotion. I recall hearing from many of the brothers of this place, that while he lived, he strove most zealously to serve Almighty God under the Rule of monastic discipline. When, having completed the course of his life, he departed from this world, such a fragrance of scent issued from the place where he lay lifeless, that the whole monastery was suddenly and wonderfully filled with the sweetness of that scent, as if it were the corner of a house perfumed.

While all were refreshed by the ineffable sweetness of that scent and marvelled at it, knowing nothing of what it was, a messenger came in haste from the infirmary, reporting that the monk Gregory had died. Almighty God willed to show how great the merit of that man was, whose soul, as it departed, filled the entire monastery with such a wondrous fragrance.

Another man, as the brothers who are still alive recount, was called Angelus. A monk in this monastery, his life indeed did not seem unlike his name. When, afflicted by bodily illness, he came to the end of his last day, a possessed man entered the kitchen; and behold,

he suddenly began to make noise and, madly leaping from the ground into the air, he cried out with loud voices, complaining that he was being assaulted by Benedict, saying: “Oh, what has Benedict just done to me, taking from me the soul of the monk Angelus on account of the small cowl he wore on his head, and carrying it off with him!”

While all stood stunned at his words and did not understand what he was saying, the signal that is sounded to indicate the death of a brother rang out. All the brothers hastened to the infirmary and found the monk Angelus already dead. From this it was clearly shown that his soul could not be harmed, he whose death caused the ancient enemy to appear so sorrowful and mournful before the brothers.

Theophilus:

I ask you, why does the devil harbour such great enmity against the human race? From the moment of birth until the end of life, he strives in every way to turn man away from the commandments of his Creator and to lay whatever snares he can for one who is striving toward the eternal homeland.

Desiderius:

The reason is clear. The ancient enemy tried to make himself equal to his Creator, suffered a great fall and was plunged into the abyss of the deep pit. He is opposed to the human race in every way, because he sees man ascending to that place from which he himself, through pride, fell irrecoverably. It follows that he is seen to rage, to go mad, and to gnash his teeth terribly at the passing of the elect of God.

There was a certain monk named Azo, of sufficiently religious life, who restored, with all diligence, the church of the blessed Archangel Michael in the valley called “of the King.” The church had been built with wondrous workmanship by the most Christian Emperor Louis, but was afterwards destroyed by the Saracens. And there Azo gathered brothers to the service of Almighty God, as best he could. When he had spent many years there in God’s

service, approaching extreme old age, he returned to our monastery, from which he had been sent by his abbot.

Worn by old age and illness, lying on a bed in the infirmary, he was now drawing his final breath and about to die. Many of the brothers, keeping vigil around his bed, were waiting for his passing with hymns and psalms. But a certain brother, who still lives and is among us in the monastery as an old man, was then young. He was resting with the other brothers in the dormitory. Suddenly, in the dead of night, looking up, he saw in a vision the blessed Archangel Michael – whose face he recognised from a painting – coming through the dormitory. Another angel followed behind at a slight distance.

Looking at him, he said: "Lord, are you not the blessed Archangel Michael?"

"Indeed, I am."

Then he asked, "Where are you going, Lord?"

"To the infirmary, to take Brother Azo with me, for now the time is come. I go."

With these words, the vision disappeared. Immediately waking, he rose and hastened to the infirmary and found that Brother Azo had just breathed out his soul from the body. From this, it is clear the blessed Michael took Azo with him, and that the same angel had testified he had come to receive him.

A certain brother in our monastery was called Stephen the Venetian. Coming from the regions of Venice, he lived most zealously in the habit of holy conversation. The excellence of his humility, patience, and obedience was clear to all the brothers who gathered there in the service of Almighty God. And when the time came that his worthy conduct should be rewarded by the most just Lord, burdened by bodily affliction, he ended his final day in the presence of the brothers.

A most devout old woman, named Agundia, a virgin in mind and body, lived in the habit of a nun near the church of the Blessed Mary ever Virgin, situated in the city founded

near the base of Mount Cassino. As was her custom, before the clerics of that city had risen to offer the nocturnal praises to God, she stood before the aforementioned church of the Mother of God, and with groaning, tears, and sighs prayed to Almighty God. Suddenly, in the dead of night, she looked up and saw a fiery column coming forth from the cell in which the infirm brothers were accustomed to rest, stretching up into the heavens.

She sent a messenger to the monastery, to diligently inquire whether any of the infirm brothers in that cell had departed this world. The messenger quickly climbed the mountain, entered the monastery, went to the infirmary, and found that the devout monk Stephen had died. Inquiring more carefully, he found he had breathed out his soul at the very hour when the fiery column was seen by the handmaid of God to penetrate the heights of the heavens.

Another man in our monastery was John the Venetian, a monk of wondrous patience, obedience, and humility, whose great merit before Jesus Christ the Lord became most clear after his death. When a certain brother, whose name has slipped from memory, suffered an accidental rupture in the groin, so that his internal organs slipped between the flesh and skin due to a torn membrane, he went to John's tomb. Prostrating himself upon it, with tears and groans from the deepest desire of his heart, he begged that John might pray to the Lord for him, firmly believing that through John's merits he might receive healing. In this life, John had striven with all his strength to serve Almighty God.

After the brother had lain a little while praying upon John's tomb, he was so restored to health that no sign of his former affliction remained.

Smaragdus the monk, who still survives and resides in our monastery, told me what I now relate: that he had heard it from Leo, the venerable presbyter, his uncle, and that he had received it from the mouth of Anthony, a monk and priest, who was well learned in both secular and sacred letters and, having lived from his youth to the end of his life in the monastery, became known to almost everyone in this province.

As Anthony related the story to Leo, Anthony had once suffered a rupture in a secret part of his body, and as the affliction grew worse, he was tormented greatly each day. He considered hiring a doctor to bleed or cauterise him, if in any way he might recover his health. Yet he feared that, if he were bled by the doctor, as often happens, he might perhaps die; but again, if he were not bled, to endure the persistent pain seemed more dangerous than death itself.

While Anthony pondered these things for a long time, he believed there was only one remedy: that he should go to the tomb of blessed Benedict, and implore his mercy, hoping that by his patronage he might be healed – Anthony had most devoutly dedicated himself to Benedict's Rule when he renounced the world.

So he entered the church and, humbly prostrating himself before the altar, he prayed for a long time, that Almighty God might deign to grant him healing through the merits of so great a father. After the prayer, he rose from the floor on which he had lain prostrate, and gathered dust from the step of the altar. Wrapping the dust in a cloth, he laid it on the place where he was suffering. The next day, he was so completely healed that not even a sign of the former illness remained.

About Paul, a monk of holy life, I recount what I remember hearing from still-living brothers who knew him very well. When this same Paul came to our monastery for the sake of his salvation, he was devoutly received by Abbot Theobald, a religious man indeed, who at that time honourably presided over the brothers. This venerable father ordered him to live in the monastery of the blessed father Benedict, which is built within the city of Capua. When he arrived at that place, he so bound himself to the Rule of holy discipline that he was regarded with wonder by all.

But almighty, merciful, and gracious God deigned to show how pleasing Paul's worthy life had been to Him in this world after his death. When Paul had spent some years in

the monastery living a religious, honourable, and God-pleasing life, he was struck by bodily illness and, at the Lord's command, departed from the prison of the flesh.

Now, a certain bishop of venerable life, coming from the regions of Gaul, was hastening for the sake of prayer to the church of Saint Michael the Archangel, which is located on Mount Gargano. When he came to the city of Capua, he stopped near the church of Saint Stephen the Protomartyr and lodged there.

Rising from his bed in the dead of night, he stood before the church of the said martyr. Lifting up his prayers, with tears, to the ears of Almighty God, he suddenly looked to the eastern right-hand part and saw a brilliant light, like the rays of the sun, wondrously flying through the air from the monastery. He stood amazed, marvelling for a long time at the light, and then a bell rang in the monastery, by which the death of a brother was signalled. At once he understood that someone of great merit among the brothers had passed from this world, and with that very light had penetrated the heights of heaven.

He gathered the clerics and told them what he had seen, and sent a messenger to the monastery to find out who had died there and report back. When the messenger entered the monastery, he found that the venerable monk Paul had breathed out his soul.

John was a very devout monk and priest, of whom I have made mention. Leaving the governance of the monastery, he withdrew to the solitude of the hermitage, and remained alone in the nearby forest until the very end of his life. As a hermit, he gave himself over to fasting, vigils, and prayers, and strove with an attentive mind to serve Almighty God.

When he passed from this life in the days of Abbot Theobald, a monk named John in the monastery of Saint Laurence the Martyr, located within the city of Capua, was most diligently engaged in the service of God. He rose one night from his bed before the brothers had awakened for vigils, in accordance with his custom to pray to Almighty God. While

praying with focused mind to the merciful Lord, he saw in the air a very bright light. Within it he saw the soul of the venerable monk John penetrating heaven.

When morning came, he wished to know more certainly what he had seen, so he went to Andrew, who at that time was prior of the cell of this monastery located within the city of Capua. He told him what he had seen and earnestly asked that a messenger be sent to the monastery to thoroughly investigate the matter.

Andrew, eager to fulfil the request, sent a messenger to carefully identify the facts and report back. But as this messenger hurried on his way, a man from the monastery met him on the road, announcing to the brothers dwelling in the aforementioned cell at Capua the death of the said servant of God. Questioning him closely, the messenger learned that the aforementioned servant of God had departed from this life at the very hour in which the devout monk John, residing in Capua, had seen him wondrously ascend to heaven.

Then both men returned to those who had sent them: one reporting the death of the servant of God, and the other the vision.

From the testimony of many brothers, I have learned these things I write down in our little book. Peter, the venerable Bishop of Hostia, elegantly and properly inserted this in the sermon he composed to be read at the vigils of the blessed father Benedict. However, among the miracles that Almighty God has deigned to show even in our time (or in that of our elders, by whose reports we know) I have taken care to insert this also, so that if that sermon has not come into someone's hands, and he instead learns of it here, he may praise God in His wonders, who at all times nourishes the tender hearts of His own with fresh sustenance.

At a certain time, from the beginning of May until the end of July, a dryness of the air occurred so that the parched earth, split with frequent cracks, seemed not to be moistened even by the smallest water-drops. A certain peasant, wanting to burn the stubble of his wheat harvest so he might more easily cultivate the land, was careless with the fire. As the fire

gradually licked the stubble and its flame rose high, it leapt, blown by a breeze, into the forest below the monastery, despite the peasant's efforts.

With the forest fuelling it, the fire, running along the slopes of the mountain, threatened to consume the entire monastery. People from all sides looked on. The brothers, awakened from their beds by the crackling flames, were terrified in fear and disturbed in mind, for the event occurred during midday, when they were resting. They saw a great and sudden danger, one they could not resist, so they turned to divine aid.

With all their strength and from the deepest affection of their hearts, they begged Almighty God that, by the merits of the blessed father Benedict, He would, in whatever way He wished, by His own power, rescue the monastery from the fire. The brothers completely despaired that the monastery could be saved by human hands. Some prayed with hands raised to heaven, others with bodies prostrated on the ground, and still others on bent knees with heads bowed to the earth. Then suddenly a small cloud gathered on the side of this mountain, and by divine commanding power, spread above its peak. This cloud poured forth such a heavy rain that it extinguished the fire and freed the monastery.

Let us strive, therefore, brothers, to live religiously and piously, and to gain such a patron by serving God. By Benedict's merits a cloud covered the summit of this mountain and, pouring forth abundant rain, extinguished the fire. By his prayers as well. If we diligently and devoutly, with good works, beseech him, by the mercy of God we shall be delivered from the flame of burning vices.

At a certain time, as I have learned from those who knew well, the brothers of this monastery were constructing a church of Saint Scholastica the Virgin within the city of Gaeta, so that they might have a lodging there whenever they went to purchase goods. One of the workers was breaking stones for use in building the church's walls, on the top of a cliff which

juts over the sea at the edge of the city. As he struck the stones with a hammer, the hammer head flew off the handle and fell down the great cliff. It dropped into the sea.

Greatly distressed, he went at once to the brothers and sorrowfully reported what had happened. Since all hope of recovery was gone, they decided to make another hammer with which to break stones for the church's construction. Then one of the brothers said: "Let us go down there, brothers. Perhaps blessed Benedict, by his merits, will restore the hammer to us. He miraculously retrieved an iron tool for a Goth from the depths of a lake and joyfully returned it so the Goth could finish the work he had begun."

The proposal pleased the others. Going down to the sea, they entered a boat and rowed across the bay to the spot where the hammer had fallen from the worker's hand. The depth of the water was so great, there was no hope of retrieving the tool by any human skill.

Trusting in the help of Almighty God and in the merits of blessed father Benedict, they cast the handle onto the sea. In a wondrous manner, the iron head immediately attached itself to the handle. Pulling it out, they gave thanks to God and to Saint Benedict, and joyfully returned to their work.

Theophilus:

I remember this miracle being done in the Old Testament by the blessed Elisha and in the New by the most holy father Benedict. But when I consider how far apart the merits of those men were from these, I confess I feel greater wonder at this recent miracle.

Desiderius:

This event, dearest brother, we ought to attribute not so much to those men, as to him in whose merits they trusted. Do you want me to tell you something about people possessed by demons, who were healed in this monastery by the mercy of God and the intercession of blessed Benedict? The hearts of listeners might be strengthened in the praises of God and might grow hot with love for the supreme divinity.

Theophilus:

Whatever you wish to say for the edification of the listeners, go on. I will gladly listen.

Desiderius:

A certain boy, lying in bed in the guesthouse, together with his father, rose during the silence of the night to attend to a bodily necessity. Suddenly a huge lion appeared, roaring with its teeth and ready to tear him with its claws. It was dreadful to behold. Terrified, the boy fell to the ground, crying out. At the sound of his voice, his father rose quickly from bed, and hurried to him. With fatherly concern, he asked why he had cried out and what had happened.

Trembling and quaking, the boy reported that he had seen a huge lion coming towards him. His father, soothing him with kind words, took him in his arms and brought him back to bed. But the devil, who had appeared to him in the form of a lion, entered into the boy and after a few days began to torment him very violently.

He was brought to the church before the altar of blessed Benedict. Lying prostrate with eyes closed on the floor, he began, in a wondrous way, to name anyone who entered the monastery gate, saying: “This man or that man is now entering through the gate of the monastery.”

A certain brother, having gone down from the monastery to the city for a matter of obedience, received twelve coins from someone. Wishing to hide them for his own benefit, he placed them in his bosom. But when he returned to the monastery and approached the tormented boy, the devil began to accuse him through the mouth of the boy, saying: “This monk, contrary to the rule of his order, received twelve coins. He keeps them hidden in his bosom for his own advantage.”

When the brothers asked him whether the accusations were true, he immediately confessed his guilt, crying out that it was entirely so.

Another brother, whose name I omit so that he might not suffer shame, had been brought from another monastery to ours for the sake of his salvation. One night, during the night vigils, he was reading a lesson from the Old Testament in the church, as was customary, while the brothers were seated. The tormented boy happened to be present. And behold, suddenly the devil cried out through his mouth, declaring that he knew thoroughly all the things being read and had been there (i.e., present at the events described). He reproached the reader in this manner: "If I wanted to tell the things I know about you, I could indeed cause you great shame."

Indeed, it was found out that this brother had lived rather worldly in his own monastery.

After the brothers had prayed for a long time before the tomb of the blessed father Benedict on behalf of the tormented boy, he became so healthy that he no longer seemed to be tormented by the evil spirit.

At the same time, another little boy saw a huge Ethiopian standing on the roof of a house, and being very terrified, immediately fled. But the same demon pursued him to the door of the house, threw him to the ground, and immediately entered into him and began to torment the poor child harshly.

When the boy had been brought several times over a number of days to the oratory before the tomb of the aforesaid father, the demon, by the merits of that same father, left him and departed, so that he no longer dared to approach him.

Another man, named John, who is still alive though advanced in age and serves in the infirmary, was brought from the province of the Marsians (where he had been born) to this monastery by relatives for the sake of recovering his health. He was held by a most wicked demon. His relatives had no doubt that, by the merits of blessed Benedict, he could recover

his health, having heard that many afflicted with various illnesses had been restored to their former health at his shrine.

After not a long time, the enemy was driven out. John's health recovered, which brought great joy to those who saw him.

Theoderic, also a monk and priest, who is still alive and living with us in this monastery while leading a religious life, had a nephew whom he greatly loved. Into this nephew the ancient enemy entered. Not to torment him openly, but secretly bringing a sickness, making him appear paralytic. The aforesaid uncle, trusting in the merits of the blessed father Benedict, had him brought to himself for the sake of recovering his health.

He remained in this monastery for a while, sick as he had come, and no one thought that he was possessed by a demon. One day he was taken by his uncle to a venerable man named Lambert, who lived as a hermit in the forest next to the church of the holy martyrs Cosmas and Damian, so that he might receive his blessing. The man of God gave him blessed bread and ordered him to eat it. When he had placed the bread in his mouth and tasted it, the demon hidden in him proved unable to endure the blessing of so great a gift. It began to make noise, cry out, and leap about, thereby revealing the cause of the sickness.

After he returned with his uncle to the monastery, and it became known openly that he was possessed by a demon, he was brought into the oratory, where all the brothers gathered together to pray to almighty God for him. When the prayer and psalmody had been completed at the sixth hour, the brothers went to the refectory for the refreshment of their bodies, leaving two or three monks with him. Those who remained prayed tearfully for divine mercy on his behalf, that by the intercession of his most blessed confessor Benedict, He might deign to free the captive man.

A monk of venerable old age was seen to stand before the altar, and with mighty power commanded the ancient enemy to depart.

Immediately the demon exited from the possessed with a great force and vomiting, and no longer dared to approach him. This old man was found to be the blessed Maurus, whose relics the brothers had placed with great hope and devotion upon the possessed's chest. He who had been freed from the demon became a monk in this monastery and remains with the other brothers, persevering in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A certain rustic lived in the vicinity of this monastery, in a village called Saint Michael's. He devoutly celebrated the feast of blessed Nicholas, confessor of Christ, each year with his little household, as best he could. On the day on which the solemnity of the saint was observed, he approached the basilica consecrated in Nicholas' name with his wife and his son, still of a young age, to offer his gift to the Lord. After the solemnities of the Mass had been fulfilled and they had received the communion of the sacred Body and Blood of the Lord, they returned home.

The boy asked his father for permission to go out to the field; but his father restrained him, saying: "It is not fitting, O son, to go out to the field today for any work, because although unworthy, we have received the divine sacraments, and the feast of our patron, the most blessed Nicholas, is everywhere observed with great devotion."

But the boy was given to childish light-mindedness. Disregarding his father's orders, he secretly ran from the house and went alone to see the fields.

He stayed in the field for some time. When he saw the sun beginning to set and dark night spreading over the land, he went to a nearby forest to cut wood, so that he might not return empty-handed, and thus might regain the favour of his father, whose words he had disdained. When he had already begun to gather the wood into a bundle, he suddenly perceived the sound of a violent wind. Looking up, he saw a very black bird, like a vulture, flying through the air with great force. It landed not far away, on the path by which the boy had to return.

Struck with fear and trembling, he looked at it. The bird transformed itself into the appearance of a very black boy, with bristly hair standing upright, and the hem of his garments ending in red. While the boy, frightened, considered in his mind what he saw, the ancient enemy spoke to him as follows: “Become wholly mine, O boy, and come with me to the bank of this nearby river. There I will give you a great abundance of gold and silver, so that you may return home not with wood, but laden with gold and silver. Thus, while you live, you will surpass all your relatives and neighbours in wealth and enjoy a splendid and luxurious life on earth.”

The ancient enemy was not persuading him in order to give what he promised, but so that he could drown and kill him in the river. The boy, frequently invoking the name of Christ, tried to protect himself with the sign of the cross and responded in a tearful voice with these words: “Far be it from me, far be it, that I should ever become the servant of anyone except the One who created me, almighty God, and my father, who begot me.”

When he again and again made the sign of salvation over himself, the demon withdrew into the waters of the nearby river and, with a great noise, submerged himself. There he began to hiss like serpents, bray like donkeys, bellow like bulls, and roar like lions, and he struck such great fear into the poor boy that the entire forest seemed to spin around him in dizziness.

When the boy lay almost lifeless on the ground, completely unaware of what to do, behold, suddenly an old man appeared standing beside him, with a mitered head and clothed in a white stole. He said to him: “What are you doing here, when the hour is already growing late? With everyone gone, the fields have become nearly deserted. Rise and hasten home, lest if you remain here any longer, you fall into grave danger.”

The boy rose from the ground. As he bent to lift the bundle, the old man disappeared. And again the evil spirit came before his eyes and began to speak with the same words as

before. But the boy denied him entirely. Crying and wailing, he fell to the ground and begged the mercy of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all, to grant aid.

The venerable old man appeared again, and urged the boy to rise quickly and carry the wood away. At his coming, the enemy vanished like smoke. This old man we believe with certainty to have been blessed Nicholas, whose feast the aforementioned rustic had celebrated that day.

The boy, rising from the ground at the command of the old man, lifted the bundle and returned home at great speed. And as he later told it, the bundle of wood had become so light that it seemed to have no weight at all.

But when he had returned home and lingered a little, the demon entered into him and began to torment him horribly. His troubled parents stood by, weeping, and the whole household gathered around, crying aloud. When they saw they could bring him no help, they found another counsel. They brought him to the monastery, to the threshold of blessed Benedict, and laid him down before the venerable tomb on the right side of the altar. They wept and begged for the mercy of the Lord.

Although fiercely tormented, the possessed boy fell asleep. While he lay sleeping in exhaustion, he seemed to see his side being opened. From there a man of most radiant appearance, clothed in a white garment, came forth and, touching his belly and chest for a long time, commanded him to rise and depart. Immediately waking, the boy rose up completely healed, so that he felt no further attack of the demonic affliction.

All these things I learned from the very mouth of the suffering boy himself, as he tearfully recounted them.

Theophilus:

These things you recount I greatly marvel at. I am struck with trembling at the hidden judgements of Almighty God – why He permitted the boy to be handed over to an unclean

spirit. The boy, together with his father, devoutly celebrated the feast of the blessed Nicholas and received the communion of the body and blood of the Lord.

Desiderius:

Observe, truly, how great a sin it is not to obey parents. Scripture says, *"Honour your father and your mother, that you may be long-lived upon the earth,"* and likewise, *"It is better to obey than to sacrifice, and to listen rather than to offer the fat of rams; for rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is like the crime of idolatry."* Solomon says, *"Hear, my son, the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother, that grace may be added to your head and chains to your neck,"* and in another place: *"He who abandons his father is of evil fame, and he who provokes his mother is cursed by God."*

This happened by the just judgement of God. God permitted this boy to be chastised for his disobedience, but in His customary mercy He did not allow him to remain under the same punishment. From this everyone may understand how great a danger disobedience brings, and to what degree one must humbly subject himself to obedience to parents.

Theophilus:

Your response has satisfied my question.

Desiderius:

In the diocese of the bishopric of Teate, there is a noble monastery at the foot of Mount Magella, built in honour of Saint Liberator and subject to this our monastery of Monte Cassino. A great multitude of brothers dwell there, serving Christ the Lord, the true King, according to the rule of the blessed Benedict.

At a certain time, while the brothers were resting in silence of night in the usual way, a venerable man clothed in monastic habit appeared to one of them. Waking him up, he encouraged him to rise quickly from bed. When the brother had arisen, the man said to him: "Hasten and wake all the brothers, and urge them with loud cries to rise quickly and go to the

church. The cell in which they are resting is about to collapse completely." Obeying the orders, the brother began to cry with a loud voice: "Rise, brothers, rise and get out of this cell at once. It is about to collapse. Leave it as quickly as possible, lest you, God forbid, be crushed by its ruins."

The brothers, awakened and disturbed by his shouting, asked how he had known this. He told them what he had seen and what had been said to him. Immediately, the brothers rushed out. Entering the church, they began to chant the night office to the Lord with the usual ringing of bells.

While they were devoutly performing the customary services, the said building collapsed with a great crash. Terrified, the brothers hastened to search, lest anyone had been crushed by the ruin. They moved aside the fallen materials here and there, and found one brother, burdened with old age, safe under the ruins. After extracting him, they questioned how he had escaped. But he said: "As the building, thoroughly collapsing, was falling upon me, a shining man, dressed in monastic attire, stood by me. With his arm, he supported the ruin about to fall and crush me. He preserved me unharmed, as you yourselves now see."

This shining man is believed to have been the blessed Benedict. Benedict, with fatherly kindness, rescued the Lord's flock by his warning and protection, and defended with the hand of his concern the old man unable to flee.

A certain brother in the same monastery was called John, who, pressed by age and sickness, was drawing his last breath. One day, when some of the brothers had come to him as usual to chant the morning praises, he restrained them with the voice he could muster, saying: "I do not want you to chant the canonical hours for me any longer, for the Lord Abbot with many brothers clothed in white garments has just now come to me for the sake of visiting. Chanting the morning office, they said they will shortly return and take me with them."

The brothers waited attentively to see whether what he said was true; and after the space of one hour, that brother with great rejoicing gave up his spirit. From this we can see that the most blessed father Benedict was he who appeared with that gathering of white-robed ones and, as he had promised, took the brother with him. These things I have recounted I found written on an old page in a rather unpolished style. I have sought to add them now to our little book.

Almighty God sometimes shows His wonders not only in great matters but also in small ones, so that the faith of believers may increase and all creation burst forth into praise of its Creator, since in all things granted to human use He is seen to care with fatherly kindness. I will not neglect to relate what I learned from the venerable monk George, who still survives and is the custodian of that church, concerning what happened in our times regarding the church lamps.

One day, when one of the custodians had lit a lamp before the altar in the oratory and had lifted it upwards to the ceiling, it suddenly fell and crashed down on the pavement before the altar. Wonderful is God in His works! Not only was it not broken, but neither was the oil spilled nor the flame within extinguished.

Another time, when the aforesaid George wanted to adjust the lamp before the image of the Saviour, painted above the church doors, he found it hanging in the air with extended hooks so that it was supported by no material at all. He called together the nearby brothers, to show them, so that they might be witnesses to so great a miracle.

Another time in this same church of blessed Benedict, on the night preceding the day on which his feast is celebrated, as I received from those who were present at this miracle, one of the custodians was adjusting the lamp before the image of the same blessed Benedict during the vigil. The lamp suddenly fell to the floor and remained unbroken. It was lifted up

three times and fell three times. What is more miraculous, neither did it break, nor was the oil spilled, nor was the flame inside extinguished, by the preserving power of God.

Many more miracles of this sort have been performed through the lamps in the oratory of this monastery. Because they are very similar, we thought it unnecessary to record them all. However, we have recorded these, lest, because they are small, they might be seen to be utterly despised.

One thing, however, which the previous book omitted shall now be reported. I had promised to tell you how Almighty God has often delivered this monastery from the hands of tyrants. I have judged it fitting to record it here in the second book, lest it fall into forgetfulness.

In the time of our predecessor Atenulf, the estates of this monastery were fiercely harassed by the Count of Aquino. Neither by the prayers of the monks nor by the reverence of the blessed father Benedict, the founder and builder of this monastery, could the Count's spirit be softened so that he might refrain from harming this place. The aforesaid abbot, compelled by necessity, saw that the man's savage mind could in no way be appeased, and so he brought in certain Normans, who at that time, by the conduct of our princes, were arriving in Italy. By bringing the Normans into the possessions of this monastery, the abbot deemed he might defend those possessions from the Count.

After they had received both houses for dwelling and stipends by which they might be supported in abundance, the Normans began to defend nobly and faithfully, as valiant soldiers, the properties belonging to the monastery, repelling enemies far and wide.

While the abbot and he who succeeded him in second rank in the governance still lived, the hired soldiers remained honourably faithful. But after, alas, they had died and the fortune of our princes was somewhat altered and began to waver, the Norman band, which had been admitted for our defence, became unfaithful and hostile. Like a creeping cancer,

they daily, to our ruin, took things from us. Driven by sacrilegious greed for dominion, they brought the possessions under their own control.

From so great and so vast a possession, nothing remained for the use of our benefit except the city at the foot of Mount Cassino, with the lands of four or five villages. Even those, as barbaric greed does not know how to restrain itself, were daily oppressed by the Normans, who gave wealth to themselves and misery and poverty to us.

They persistently carried this out without any compassion of spirit. Finally, the merciful and kind God determined in His goodness to help His servants suffering from hunger and poverty. The most blessed father Benedict appeared in a vision to a certain peasant living in a small field of one of our little villages. He commanded that he should go out and follow him.

The peasant focused his attention on this vision. It seemed to him that the most blessed Benedict, with the staff he held in his hand, drove out all the Normans who had invaded his possessions, and with powerful strength expelled them, empty of goods and loaded with shame, from the inheritance of his monastery.

That same year, the Norman cohort, more arrogant than usual, occupied the fortress which is called Saint Andrew. Thus they might more securely hold what they had taken.

This indeed brought the Norman minds to domination and ours to despair.

After they had taken possession of the fortress, they gathered in one group, and entered with great arrogance into the city of Cassino.

There, by the will of God, they were overcome by the people of the city, and some of them were either killed or captured. The rest fled, and withdrew into the stronghold of the fortress.

The inhabitants of this land, forming a united band and being helped from all sides by their neighbours, set their hearts on besieging the fortress.

I am about to say something wondrous. The siege was established and javelins were being fiercely hurled from both sides. Then the spears of the Normans, as if driven back by the blast of winds, wounded those by whom they had been thrown.

What more is needed?

When they saw themselves being attacked by their own weapons, and that they could no longer resist, the Normans perceived that "it is hard to kick against the goad." Since they recognised they were fighting against the divine right hand, they surrendered and gave themselves into the hands of the abbot and monks; by whom they were barely defended and sent back to their companions dwelling in the town of Aversa.

So it happened that from that time, by the merits of the blessed Benedict, this land in which we live has remained free from Norman harassment, and continues secure under his holy protection.

The structure of this book compels us to move towards the end, but the virtue of obedience, first among virtues, does not allow us to pass over in complete silence a certain brother. He pursued it with total humility of heart even unto death – imitating Him who, obedient to the Father even unto death, left us an example of obedience and of patience.

This brother, Rainerius by name, was of our congregation, young in age but mature in conduct. Many of the brothers who are still alive, and who knew him well, testify that he was of such great humility and such great obedience that all considered him admirable.

One day, he was instructed by his abbot to travel into the territory of Teate to carry out some task for the benefit of the monastery. Joyful as always and ready for obedience, he hastened to fulfil the orders and began his journey. After he had travelled a certain distance, he was attacked by bandits working for a powerful man named Oderisius. Under his orders, they were lying in wait along the roads, ready to seize anything they could from the possessions of this monastery. They took everything he was carrying and killed him.

His body, whether because of the ambushes of enemies or because the place was far away, could not be brought to this monastery. It was buried in the ground at a nearby church.

However, how pleasing his obedience was to Almighty God, God deigned to show through his lifeless body. Many afflicted with illness approached his tomb and, having received healing, returned to their homes in good health.

Among them was Count Atto, son of the great Count Atto and also the son-in-law of the aforementioned Oderisius. Severely afflicted and tormented by fevers, Atto came to his tomb, drawn by its fame. There, prostrated in prayer, with the fever receding, he rose so fully healed that he felt nothing of the illness he had previously endured. Giving thanks for the healing he had received, and leaving a fine cloak over the tomb as a gift, Atto departed joyfully.

Since we mention the wonders of God, I have not thought it right to pass over in silence something that happened to me myself. Scripture says that “it is good to hide the secret of a king, but it is honourable to reveal and proclaim the works of God.”

When I was a child, suffering from a violent fever, the priest John of blessed memory came to visit me. He was a man of reverend dignity, held in great esteem in our city of Benevento.

He sat briefly with those who had come with him. Seeing that I was severely afflicted by a tertian fever, and moved by the love he had for me, he rose, and with his face bathed in tears, he invoked the Lord in a soft voice. He placed his hand on my head, and the fever, which had been cruelly attacking me, was driven away.

I shall also write at the end of this book what I learned from someone, about a time when Abbot Leo governed the monastery of the Apostle Saint Paul. This is located two miles outside the city of Rome, where his most holy body is venerated and honoured, shining with signs and miracles.

My source said the very reverend monk Adam, keeper of the church there, had told him that when he had gone out the gate to perform some work, he had met two young men dressed in monastic habit, at the very entrance of the monastery. Adam greeted them with care and asked who they were. He heard from them that one was called Protus and the other Hyacinthus. But when Adam, stunned, asked why they had come, they said, “We have come to visit the brothers who today devoutly recall our memory.”

For that was the day on which, with the Lord granting it, they had deserved the palm of martyrdom by the shedding of their blood for Christ.

Adam stood in astonishment for a little while. As the two entered the monastery, continuing their journey, he came to his senses. Desiring to understand more clearly what he had heard, he quickly pursued them. Adam searched carefully here and there throughout the monastery and could in no way find them, so began to ask those he met where the monks were who had just entered and spoken to him. But they all declared they had seen no one enter the monastery except him.

From this it is clear that those who appeared to him were truly the holy martyrs Protus and Hyacinthus, whose feast was being celebrated by the brothers that very day.

All these things, I learned from Firmus, an elder monk of this monastery, and the nephew of the same Adam, when he returned to the monastery and reported what the latter had told him while he was in Rome.

Let this day’s account end here, so that, with this book concluded in honour of such great martyrs, we may, with our spirits refreshed by the span of this night, faithfully come to the narration of the rest – helped by the prayers of these saints and of all the saints.

Dialogues on the Miracles of Saint Benedict

Desiderius, Abbot of Monte Cassino

Book Three

By the grace of Christ, two books have been completed, where we have written about the wonders God has wrought by His own bounty, either in this monastery or in the cells subject to it. Let us proceed, with the Lord permitting, to the narration of the third. The remaining matters, which occurred outside the walls of this monastery and which we have learned by sight or hearing, still remain to be written in the remaining two books. It seems worthwhile to me to begin from the very head of the Church and then afterwards to come by progression to each member.

Through the negligence of priests, especially the Roman pontiffs, Italy deviated little by little from the right path of religion. Evil custom grew so great that, with the authority of sacred law set aside, all things divine and worldly were confused. So much so that the people sold elections and the priests sold consecrations and the gift of the Holy Spirit – which by divine authority was to be received and given freely – for money given and taken by hand, led by greed. Hardly any were found who were not defiled by the contagion of this simoniacal plague and who, clean before God, kept the commandments of the Lord.

While the crowd of clerics trod the path of unbridled licence with none restraining them, the very presbyters and deacons, who ought to handle the sacraments of the Lord with a clean heart and chaste body, began to take wives in the manner of laymen, and to leave the sons born of them as heirs in their wills. Some even, with all shame cast off, lived together with their wives in the same house – even bishops. This most wicked and detestable custom

flourished most of all within the City of Rome itself, from where, once, the norm of religion had gone forth everywhere from the apostle Peter and his successors.

After several years where some held the chair of pontiff in name only, a certain Benedict IX (Benedict by name but not in deed), the son of a certain consul Alberic, followed the footsteps more of Simon Magus than of Simon Peter. With no small amount of money poured out by his father among the people, he claimed for himself the supreme priesthood.

As for the kind of life he lived after attaining the priesthood – how vile, how shameful, how execrable it was – I shudder to relate. Rather, I shall begin to narrate how Almighty God deigned to look upon the face of His Church.

Benedict IX plundered, murdered, and committed other unspeakable crimes upon the Roman people for some time. The people gathered together as one because they could no longer bear his wickedness. Expelling him from the pontifical chair, they cast him from the City. In his place, they substituted another, namely John, bishop of Sabina [Pope Sylvester III] yet not without a bribe, disregarding the canons.

This man, after sitting on the Roman chair for no more than three months, was driven out of the City in disgrace by Benedict IX, who, with his relatives attacking from all sides (he was of the consular class and thus powerful) returned to his episcopate.

Benedict IX, therefore, recovered the priesthood which he had lost. But in no way had he changed his former ways, according to what is written: “A young man, according to his own way. Even when he grows old, he will not depart from it.”

Since it is hard for a new idea to take hold in an old heart, he continued in the same wicked and perverse deeds as before.

Benedict IX saw that he was held in contempt by both the clergy and the people on account of his crimes, and perceived that the fame of his misdeeds had filled all ears. Finally, upon taking counsel – since he preferred to live for pleasure like Epicurus than like a pontiff

– he resigned the supreme priesthood to a certain John [Gregory VI], an archpriest who seemed more religious than the other clergy in the City, albeit in exchange for a considerable sum of money. Benedict IX then withdrew to his own castles and departed from the City.

In the meantime, John – whose name was changed to Gregory VI – administered the priesthood for two years and eight months. Then Henry III, the king who at that time ruled over Germany, Pannonia, and Italy, came to Italy and entered the city of Rome to receive the imperial crown from the hand of the Roman pontiff so that he might henceforth be called Augustus.

But before he entered the City, he summoned John (who was called Gregory VI) to the city of Sutri, where a council of many bishops, abbots, clerics, and religious monks had been assembled. He sent bishops to invite him to come so that, under his presidency, matters concerning the Church – especially the Roman Church, which then seemed to have three popes at once – might be discussed.

These things were done with premeditation. It had long been the intention of the king to remove those three who had unjustly seized the apostolic see. With the counsel and authority of the whole council, he might lawfully depose them and appoint one man – chosen by the clergy and the people – who would diligently preside over the Lord's flock according to the statutes of the holy fathers.

The aforesaid pontiff, Pope Gregory VI, persuaded by the king and the other bishops, came gladly to Sutri, where the synod had been convened, hopeful that with the other two deposed, the pontificate would be confirmed for him alone.

But after he arrived there, and the matter began to be addressed and discussed by the synod, he recognised he could not lawfully exercise the honour of such a high priesthood. Gregory VI leapt from the pontifical seat, stripped off the pontifical garments, and – with pardon requested – resigned the dignity of the supreme priesthood.

After this, the king entered the City. He gathered the Roman clergy and people in the church of the blessed apostle Peter. Together with the bishops who had assembled at the aforementioned synod, by common counsel they elected Pope Clement II, bishop of Pammachiusburg [Bamberg], because in the Roman church there was not then any person who could worthily suffice for the honour of such a great priesthood. They enthroned and appointed Clement II in the apostolic see to govern the flock of the Lord.

When Clement II had fulfilled the priesthood for no more than nine months, he departed this life. Pope Damasus II, from Germany and supported by royal authority, succeeded him and attained the priesthood. After administering the priesthood for no more than twenty-three days, Damasus II met his final day.

To him succeeded Pope Leo IX, about whom we are presently speaking – a man apostolic in all things, born of royal stock, endowed with wisdom, distinguished in religion, thoroughly instructed in all ecclesiastical doctrine, and, just as it is written, "this one began to call upon the name of the Lord."

Him I also saw, and I was deemed worthy to have his friendship. Often too, when he celebrated Mass in church, I stood at the divine altar vested in sacred garments with him, and I read the Gospel to him. By Leo IX all ecclesiastical studies were renewed and restored, and a new light was seen to rise upon the world.

He often called a priestly council and removed priests, deacons, and other clerics who had not been ordained according to the law, and in their places appointed those who could worthily minister to the true and most high God. Daily also, through himself and his disciples sent everywhere, he preached and showed to the people the way of the Lord through letters and words. Always walking the apostolic way, he also imitated apostolic men in miracles.

Of him, indeed, I happened to hear many things. But being occupied by many affairs, and not able to investigate each detail, I shall endeavour to recount a few things from among

many. From these, whoever reads in the future may know how great the merit of this man was.

I learned from the account of Pope Gregory VII – who was raised by Leo IX and ordained a subdeacon, and who now holds the apostolic summit in the Roman city and illuminates the Church of Christ with words and examples – what I now relate. Gregory VII's words, indeed, I must believe just as if I were present and had seen it with my own eyes.

Once, while the venerable Pope Leo IX was staying in Gaul, intent on ecclesiastical business, he received from an abbot of the monastery of Saint Remigius, the confessor of Christ, a wooden cup offered for a blessing. Leo IX greatly loved the cup for the sake of so great a confessor. At the hour of refreshment, while sitting at table, he was accustomed to drink from it, disregarding golden and silver vessels.

Then, on a certain day, while he was sitting at table, the cupbearer wished, according to custom, to hand the cup to him. Through negligence, the cup fell from the hand and was immediately broken into pieces.

When the most blessed pope asked for wine two or three times, and the cupbearer delayed coming, it was reported to him that the cup from which he was accustomed to drink had fallen from the bearer's hand and had been broken. Hearing this, he was greatly saddened – not so much at the loss of the cup itself, but because he saw himself deprived of the vessel received from the monastery of Saint Remigius for a blessing.

To those standing by, he said: "Bring to me the broken cup."

It was then brought to him. Holding both broken parts, he implored Almighty God that, by the merits of the blessed Remigius, the broken cup – which he loved so greatly for his sake – might be restored. And Leo IX joined one piece to the other, and at that very moment it was solidified, so that no indication remained that it had been broken.

All present were amazed, and they acclaimed him with veneration. But Leo IX began to attribute this not to himself, but to the merits of the blessed Remigius, from whose monastery he had received the gift out of charity.

Theophilus:

In this miracle – whether of the one or the other – I hear that the first miracle of the blessed father Benedict is renewed, even if concerning a different matter: when he rejoined a cup that had been split into parts.

Desiderius:

Dearest brother, you must be silent, so that, with your mind attentive, you may come to know greater things about him.

At another time, as Pope Gregory VII mentioned to me, a certain bishop of Gaul had been suspended from episcopal office by the same blessed Leo IX. A priest of his, named Gibbertus – eloquent in speech and not moderately learned in letters – promised the bishop he would go to Rome and, by clever arguments, deceive the blessed pontiff and obtain the restoration of the office that had been taken away.

Having received money from the bishop, Gibbertus went to Rome. When he had presented himself to the blessed pontiff, he began, like a cunning serpent, to twist this way and that, excusing his bishop with rhetorical words and begging, with flattering and most humble prayers, that the office which had been (as he claimed) unjustly taken away should be restored.

But what Gibbertus was seeking was denied him, and he was not able to deceive the pope as he had hoped. So he devised another plan, lest he return to his bishop (who had given him a considerable sum of money) without effect. Therefore, Gibbertus approached the chancellor of the Apostolic See. Offering a bribe, he persuaded him to give him forged letters,

sealed with the apostolic seal, to carry to his bishop. These letters would declare that both the episcopal office and the favour of the Apostolic See had been restored.

But this affair did not escape the notice of blessed Leo IX. Calling the said priest, and taking the money he had offered, he placed it in his lap, saying: “May your money perish with you, because you tried to obtain the gift of God secretly with money.”

Divine punishment followed his words, so that from that day to this, having lost his mind, Gibbertus wanders still. No house or enclosure is able to hold him longer than two or three days.

From this matter it is clear that whoever rashly dares to deceive the servants of God or to provoke them to anger, without doubt offends God, who dwells in them. They will feel His avenging wrath, wrath which Gibbertus neglected to avoid, though he had not yet experienced it.

Theophilus:

So it is, as you say. But if any further stories about the virtue of so great a father occur to your mind, do not hesitate to continue.

Desiderius:

When the most blessed pontiff Leo IX had piously and most religiously administered the priesthood for five years, he departed from this unstable light to Christ, who is the true and eternal Light. He was carried up by angelic hands, with the citizens of heaven rejoicing. To him indeed paradise was opened, and he was received into the fellowship of the saints; but the unhappy world, which did not deserve to have such a shepherd for long, was left behind.

After his death, many great miracles shone forth at his tomb, and in other places through the Lord. Of these, omitting the rest because I am hastening to narrate the deeds of others, I will attach only two to this little book for the sake of edification.

Pope Victor II, who succeeded him in the governance of the priesthood – as has been reported to us by truthful men – heard the fame of Leo IX's miracles. He by no means believed that the Lord performed such things through him. But because, as the apostle says, "tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers," Almighty God wished to teach him by experience what he was unwilling to believe, though heard from many.

A certain bishop of Chur (whose name has escaped my memory) had come from Germany with the above-named Pope Victor II and was staying in Rome in his service. The bishop had a boy who had been mute from his mother's womb. The bishop nourished and clothed the boy for the salvation of his soul and was accustomed to take him with him wherever he went. In the boy's empty mouth, there appeared not even the slightest trace of a tongue.

This bishop too bore an unbelieving mind regarding the miracles performed at the tomb of blessed Leo IX, just as the pope did. One day he decided to return to the seat of his bishopric. He received permission, and entered the church of the blessed apostle Peter for the sake of prayer. After he had commended himself attentively to blessed Peter, he departed the City of Rome in haste, riding on horses with his attendants. But he forgot the boy, and left him behind in that same church.

The bishop was travelling along the road that led back to his homeland. But when he had already gone quite a distance from the City of Rome, it came to his mind that he had left the mute boy in the church of the blessed apostle Peter. He immediately stopped and sent back some of his servants, by whom the boy was to be brought back.

When they entered the basilica of the prince of the apostles, they saw the boy standing before the tomb of blessed Leo IX and speaking with those standing nearby. Amazed, they asked him how this had happened. The boy said:

"After my lord had left me behind in this church, I came to the tomb of blessed Leo to see if perhaps Almighty God, through his merits, would deign to restore to me the gift of speech, which I lacked. Nor was I disappointed in the desire of my heart. For as soon as I had laid myself prostrate before his venerable memorial, weeping for a little while, I immediately received my voice and rose up speaking, as you now see."

Even more miraculous, his tongue – which had been missing – began gradually to grow in his mouth. Within a few days, the boy fully regained a complete tongue and spoke words without any impediment.

They brought the boy to the bishop. The one they had left behind silent, they brought back speaking, through the merits of blessed Leo IX. The bishop returned and went to the Roman pontiff and showed Victor II what Almighty God had deigned to accomplish through blessed Leo IX.

From that point on, Victor II began to proclaim Leo IX's venerable merits to all, which previously, when others had recounted them, he had refused to believe.

Theophilus:

These miracles are pleasing because they are marvellous. More so because they are new.

Desiderius:

The illustrious man Maximus, a citizen of the city of Rome, recently reported to me a story concerning that same venerable prelate. A certain Bernard, a soldier of most wicked disposition, stood forth and opposed the Apostolic See in every way he could. In the later war waged by conspirators and Pietro Cadalo, bishop of Parma [Antipope Honorius II] – who at that time was attempting to seize the Apostolic See – against the Roman Church, Bernard perished, pierced through by the just judgement of God.

When Bernard heard of the miracles Almighty God was working for the faithful through the merits of blessed Leo IX, this man not only did not believe, but with sacrilegious mouth mocked and blasphemed them.

One day he was standing in a public assembly, and a discussion arose among the people concerning the signs and virtues of blessed Leo. He began to mock, saying: "If he is holy, as you say, let him bend my finger." And when he was restrained by those standing by, so that he would not speak such things about the holy man, he left the assembly.

Behold, by chance, a dog that was following him attacked a pig found in the street. Bernard, fearing the pig would be torn apart, ran and tried to hold the dog by grabbing it; but the pig, with its open mouth, bit his finger. From that day forward, for the rest of his life, Bernard had his finger contracted and could never extend it. Thus, it happened that the one who had dared to mock the servant of God was himself ridiculed by all, because of his contracted finger.

Enough said about so great a father, blessed Leo IX. We are hurrying to narrate the deeds of others. Let other writers, who have leisure, record the many and even more marvellous things said about him.

What the Lord says in the Gospel: "My Father works until now, and I work", we see daily being fulfilled, and ancient miracles being renewed in these new times. What I am about to tell is known not only in the diocese of Florence, but throughout Tuscany, and in the city and the capital of the world, Rome.

A cleric named Peter is said to have secretly received money, with the aid of the royal power, and obtained the episcopal chair in the city of Florence. He was kindly received by the clergy and the people, as was fitting for a bishop, but after a short time, rumours began to spread throughout the diocese, that he had been tainted by the heresy of simony. That he had purchased with money what was supposed to be freely given by the Lord. When such a

dreadful and detestable rumour reached the ears of the religious and spread to the general public, many withdrew from his communion. The Roman pontiff, having been informed about this matter, sought to investigate with divine zeal He convened a council of bishops to inquire into the matter.

When Peter presented himself to the synod, he swore an oath to clear himself, as accusations were raised from all sides. After the matter had been discussed in the presence of all, a delay was granted, perhaps so that, through the delay, Peter would be led to humbly confess, with fear of divine judgement, what he had stubbornly denied. Thus he might not be removed from the altar of eternity if he abstained from serving at the present altar, where he could not justly minister. Meanwhile, the people were divided into two factions. One faction, which placed the love of God above material gifts, followed the clerics and religious monks who had taken up the cause against the bishop. The other faction, which loved gifts and favour, followed the bishop.

Thus, the people argued among themselves, with one faction opposing the other, and the dispute grew to such an extent that sometimes they came to blows, with the shedding of blood. As these matters continued, with neither side giving way to the other, the most reverend John, abbot of the monastery called Umbrosa Vallis, was called upon to mediate this conflict. Led by zeal for God, John came with his monks and, by exhorting, preaching, and proposing divine judgement, he admonished the bishop, urging him to repent for the sin he had committed and to humbly step down from an office that had not been lawfully acquired. Thus he might not be a detriment to those he was meant to help. John often presented to Peter the example from the Gospel, how the Lord Jesus drove out those selling and buying doves from the temple, overturned the tables of the money changers, and poured out their coins, showing him that whoever, led by greed or vain glory, tries to acquire or sell the gift of the

Holy Spirit, symbolised by the dove, should know that he will be cast from that heavenly temple and eternal altar.

But Peter, greedy for the honour of this present life, regarded the advice of the holy man as nothing. On the contrary, he stubbornly tried to defend himself with arms and words, by every means possible. And when the venerable abbot saw his words were in vain, he called upon both factions of the people and said: "Since words do not avail, let us turn to signs. Let a pyre be built and set on fire, and let one of our party go into it, so that, by the judgement of the Lord, it may be proved whether what we say about the bishop is true or false."

Both parties were pleased with the decision. A pyre measuring twelve feet was constructed, within which a narrow path was left, so small that only one person could pass through. This path also was covered with burning wood, so that no part of it might remain untouched by the flame. Meanwhile, while those things were being prepared, the aforementioned Abbot John ordered his disciple – a most reverent man, later ordained as bishop in the city of Albano and who is still alive, governing the same church – that, vested in sacred garments, he should offer sacrifice to Almighty God. And then, trusting in the mercy of God, that he should enter without hesitation through the flames of the burning pyre.

The disciple obeyed the commands of his father. Having offered the sacrifice to God, he removed his chasuble and approached the fire. In a loud voice, he said: "I pray, Almighty God, if Peter, who is called bishop, is defiled by the pestilence of simony, let your Church no longer be polluted. Show forth your power by the judgement of your Holy Spirit and grant that I may pass through this fire unharmed. But if we, full of deceit, led by envy, have brought this charge against him unjustly, may the flame of this fire consume me, abandoned by your grace." Saying this, and marking himself with the sign of the holy cross, he courageously entered through the midst of the flames.

He was surrounded on all sides by the fire, to the extent he could not be seen by anyone. All thought he had been consumed. Then suddenly he leapt out the other side, assisted by the grace of Christ. Not only were his clothes untouched, but not even a hair on his head was harmed in any way by the fire.

The venerable man later reported, that while he was walking through the middle of the flames, a handkerchief fell from his hand. When he was almost out of the fire, he realised he was not carrying the handkerchief. Recognising that it had fallen in the flames, he returned through the middle of the fire and retrieved it.

All who were present, seeing such a great and astounding miracle, gave immense thanks to God. Immediately the opposing faction was united with the rest, and they expelled the aforementioned bishop from the church. He, later moved by repentance, changed his garments and was seen to live a religious life under the rule of holy conduct.

Theophilus:

I rejoice in amazement. I am joyous, that in the time of our lowliness I behold the ancient and glorious miracle of the three youths, when they came out of the furnace of blazing fire entirely whole and unharmed in body.

Desiderius:

The venerable Pope Gregory VII often told me what the Lord wished to show against that same simoniacal heresy. “When I,” he said, “was a subdeacon and had been sent to Gaul by Victor II, of blessed memory, to address ecclesiastical matters, it was my concern to summon a council of bishops so that we might discuss ecclesiastical affairs. In the city where the synod was held, there was a bishop widely accused of having bought the honour of the episcopate for a price.

So the bishop was summoned. When we began to exhort him with salutary warnings to humbly confess what his conscience bore concerning the charges against him, he, being the

bishop of that city and trusting in the support of the local count, was full of pride and utterly scorned our words. But when he saw himself being constrained under the rule of justice – something he had not expected – and had no way of escape, he persisted stubbornly in denying what he had previously scarcely deigned to listen to.

When the debate was prolonged and a great part of the day had already been spent, he still persisted in denial with the same obstinacy as he had begun. It seemed good to us and the other religious bishops present to adjure him, and to commit the whole judgement to the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. 'In the name,' I said, 'of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, whose gift of grace we have heard you have purchased, we adjure you to declare to us the truth. If you persist any further in denial as you have begun, you shall be unable to name the Holy Spirit until you confess the truth.'

That bishop was abundantly eloquent, and we exhorted him to name the Holy Spirit. He could name the Father and the Son quite fluently, but in a wondrous manner was utterly unable to name the Holy Spirit. It became clearer than daylight that he had purchased the honour of the episcopate for money, which is only granted by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The bishop, terrified by the power of the Holy Spirit, was compelled to confess humbly in front of all what he had previously, puffed up with pride and devoid of the fear of God, presumptuously dared to deny."

Theophilus:

Since the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one, and it is not permissible to think otherwise about the Holy Spirit than about the Father and the Son, why did he have his tongue fluent and eloquent when speaking the names of the Father and the Son, but was bound and entirely mute only at the name of the Holy Spirit, as if it were more excellent?

Desiderius:

By the just judgement of God, it happened that he who had purchased with persuasive speech the gift of the grace of the Holy Spirit – which is both freely given and freely received – had no function of speech when pronouncing the name of the Holy Spirit.

Alferius was abbot of the monastery of the Holy Trinity, built on the very side of the mountain which overlooks the sea between the cities of Salerno and Amalfi. His religious and God-pleasing life I myself partially observed, having stayed with him somewhat familiarly. I learned of it also from others. The miracle which divine power deigned to work in him – which I learned from very many – shall not be passed over in silence.

One day he was going to the city of Salerno for the benefit of the monastery, walking along the path of a sheer cliff. He fell down with the horse on which he was sitting through a huge precipice, which hangs over the sea at such a height that it seems to extend fifty or more paces in elevation. Those travelling with him thought he had perished. They, very sorrowful and weeping, hurried to descend by a certain detour to the sea, if perhaps they might somehow find him and deliver him to burial.

They hurried along the soft sands near the seashore, under the base of the mountain, to where Alferius had fallen. They found him safe and unharmed, riding the horse with which he had fallen, and proceeding on his journey towards Salerno at a brisk pace. They, astonished, could not understand how the event had occurred, and began to give thanks to God, raising their voices in a clamour. But they were suddenly silenced by him and heard this command: “If,” he said, “you wish to enjoy my blessings, tell no one, as long as I live, what you have seen.”

It is also said that he raised a dead man to life. This does not seem incredible to those who knew him and his life thoroughly.

Leo, the abbot who succeeded Alferius in the governance of the monastery, had been raised under his instruction, serving in the office of prior. He was closer to his predecessor than the other brothers, and recently related to me the following.

Once some secular men, so that they might benefit from his prayers, came to Alferius on a visit. Wishing to provide them with bodily refreshment after spiritual refreshment, Alferius ordered Leo, his prior, for the sake of charity, to set a table for them and prepare a meal.

Leo replied he had nothing to offer them to eat except bread, wine, and five hen's eggs, but did not know how these eggs could be divided among them. They were seven men. Alferius said: "Hurry, as quickly as possible, and prepare those same eggs by applying fire. Bring them to me, so that I may serve them."

As he had been ordered, Leo cooked the eggs and brought them to Alferius. He, receiving them, blessed them, and from the five eggs gave to the seven men – what is marvellous – one each.

Theophilus:

When I consider that five eggs, having been divided among seven men, were so multiplied that each received one equally, I see in some manner that miracle by which the Author of all fed five thousand men with five loaves.

Desiderius:

The aunt of my father, named Bella, spent her life in the habit of a nun in the monastery of the blessed Apostle Peter (located within the city of Benevento), from the flower of earliest youth to the end of old age. Though she had been betrothed to a man, she fled secretly from her parents' house to the monastery and there consecrated her virginity to Almighty God. Because she refused to have a spouse on earth, she undoubtedly deserved to have one in heaven.

She used to tell me about her abbess, who was called Offa. Offa lived for a long time on the mountain called after Saint Agatha the martyr, near the city of Capua, before she took up the governance of the monastery. She had led a hermit's life there. After taking up the governance of the monastery, on a certain night while the sisters were still resting, she entered the oratory to offer incense at the altars, as was her custom. But as she was about to place incense in the thurible, it fell from her hand. The lamp having been extinguished by the wind, she could not find the incense.

Suddenly someone stood near her and, taking her hand, gave her the incense to place in the thurible. Such a fragrance emanated from that incense that for the rest of the night, until the third hour of the day, not only the church but also the whole monastery was filled with marvellous sweetness. It was an angel of the Lord who gave her that incense of such fragrant odour.

This same devout abbess for many years presided over the virgins, and never ceased to instruct the handmaids of God entrusted to her with words and examples. Then she was struck by bodily illness and came to death. When she was near to giving back her soul to Christ, whom she had served, she was seen by all present to rise from her bed into the air about the height of three cubits. Her hands were spread toward heaven, and after making a prayer, she returned again to her bed and gave up her final breath.

From this it can be discerned how great her abstinence was. While she lay ill in bed and many honourable men and women came to her for the sake of visiting, she was entreated to take a little food to sustain her sick body. She, unaccustomed to delicacies, said, "If you bring me something from boiled legumes, perhaps I might be able to taste a little of it." Oh, such abstinence to be praised in a woman, who in her illness treated boiled legumes as if they were the highest of delicacies!

When she had died and was buried in the church, a rustic man, carrying a load of grain, passed through that same church. Making little of the merit of the one buried there, he laid his sack of grain upon her tomb and, being tired, sat down to rest a little. Suddenly, the sack was lifted by divine power from that very tomb and thrown far away, scattering the grain throughout the church.

The rustic, deeply terrified, learned from that day how much the servants of God are to be venerated in the body. The divine power wished to show that the bodies of the dead, placed in the tomb, should not be despised by anyone.

Another nobleman of Benevento, for some unknown reason, entered the monastery and, perhaps unknowingly, sat upon Offa's tomb. Suddenly, such a pain of the bowels struck him that, crying out and wailing, he believed he would die at that very hour. At his cries, the virgins in the monastery ran to him and told him whose tomb it was upon which he sat. Asking pardon for his ignorance, he deserved to receive healing from heaven by the merits of the handmaid of God.

In the same city of Benevento there is a monastery called Saint Sophia, subject to this monastery of Monte Cassino. There was a certain monk there, who though a boy, was of holy conduct and great humility. Struck by severe illness before he reached the years of youth, he was brought to the point of death.

At his passing, the brothers gathered – as is the custom – and began to commend his soul to God, to whom all live, with hymns and psalms, and to invoke the company of the saints for his aid. As his illness increased, he died. While water was being prepared to wash his body, he lay lifeless for nearly an hour. Those present persisted in prayer and psalmody, and then suddenly the boy's whole body trembled. Gradually reviving, he sat up in bed to the amazement of all who stood around.

When questioned, he began to tell them what he had seen after leaving his body. He said: “My soul went out while you were singing litanies and calling upon the saints of the Lord. The saints whom you invoked came to my aid through your prayers.”

When they asked him if he had been able to recognise those whom he had never seen, he answered: “I recognised Saint Benedict and Saint Gregory. I saw Blessed Donatus and Felix and the other saints who rest in this church. Among them Blessed Mercurius, our patron, appeared like a shining star, gleaming.”

They asked him whether he would remain in this life. He said: “By no means, for Blessed Mercurius promised today to come and take me.”

The outcome proved that what he said was true. For on that very day, he was taken from this life and was undoubtedly received by those whom he had seen coming to his aid.

Finally, I, being in the same monastery, saw one of those who had been present – a witness named Sikenolfus, still living – who affirmed he had seen and heard all these things.